



Los Angeles County
Department of Regional Planning

Planning for the Challenges Ahead



Jon Sanabria
Acting Director of Planning

March 10, 2009

TO: Supervisor Don Knabe, Chairman
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

FROM: Jon Sanabria
Acting Director of Planning

**SUBJECT: QUARTERLY STATUS REPORT ON BOARD MOTION REGARDING
RURAL ISSUES AND THE GENERAL PLAN UPDATE
(December 9, 2008, Item 39-B)**

On December 9, 2008 your Board instructed the Director of Planning to take the following actions:

1. Formulate draft standards for development of rural communities within the General Plan Update;
2. Identify provisions that relate to development of rural communities in future outreach efforts concerning the General Plan Update;
3. Make a presentation to the Association of Rural Town Councils no later than April of 2009 concerning rural issues and the General Plan Update; and,
4. Report back to the Board of Supervisors every 90 days identifying how the Department is addressing rural issues in the General Plan Update.

This is the first quarterly status report as directed by your Board motion, and summarizes the progress the Department of Regional Planning (Department) has made in addressing the actions outlined above.

Rural Outreach Summary

The General Plan Update Program began in 1999. General Plan staff conducted numerous outreach activities across the County to gather public feedback that provided the foundation for the goals and policies that currently comprise the Draft General Plan.

Additional outreach events were held in rural areas to specifically discuss expansions and modifications to the Significant Ecological Areas (SEA) Program.

Since the General Plan Update Program started, staff has worked diligently to address and incorporate all of the public comments that have been received. This work has included the analysis and incorporation of hundreds of written comments from across the County, including those from rural Town Councils, various stakeholders such as the Farm Bureau and the Antelope Valley Conservancy, and individual residents in the north County. The culmination of these outreach activities was the release of the Draft Preliminary General Plan in August 2007, and the Draft General Plan on July 30, 2008.

As part of the 2008 Draft General Plan outreach strategy, General Plan staff met with residents from the Antelope Valley on several occasions, including:

- October 20, 2008: Acton Town Council (24 attendees).
- October 30, 2008: Association of Rural Town Councils (36 attendees).
- January 28, 2009: Los Angeles County Farm Bureau (with Executive Director).
- February 2, 2009: Acton Town Council (74 attendees).
- February 18, 2009: Association of Rural Town Councils (11 attendees).

In addition to these meetings, General Plan staff has initiated discussions with several Antelope Valley residents regarding the Draft General Plan and how it may affect rural character and rural lifestyles. Staff met with a member of the Acton Town Council on October 23, 2008 at the Regional Planning offices and again with this member and another member of the Acton Town Council on February 2, 2009.

In summary, General Plan staff have conducted years of outreach activities across the County and have conducted numerous additional meetings in the Antelope Valley to gather feedback for the General Plan Update. The outreach efforts aimed at residents of the Antelope Valley and other rural unincorporated areas represent the largest portion of community outreach efforts for the General Plan Update Program to date.

Primary Policy Issues

The primary policy issues that have been noted by rural residents that relate to the Draft General Plan include:

- Lack of attention to rural community needs in the Draft General Plan;
- Lack of discrete policy language in the Draft General Plan to protect rural communities from urban encroachment or other incompatible development;
- The feeling that smart growth principles are not compatible with rural lifestyles; and,
- The appropriateness of agricultural land uses within the established rural character of the Antelope Valley.

General Plan staff has worked to revise the Draft General Plan to address the issues concerning rural lifestyles in the following ways:

- **Draft General Plan Foreword**: The Draft General Plan Foreword describes the Antelope Valley as “a series of small communities that cherish their status as the last places in Los Angeles County where one can live the rural life”, and specifically calls out Acton as a representation of County rural life, where “low density development is the norm” and whose identity is defined by enforcing rural standards.
- **Draft General Plan Introduction Chapter**: The Draft General Plan Introduction Chapter outlines the top issues that County residents felt were important topics to be addressed in the General Plan. One of the top priorities in this section is to “Protect Rural Communities and Rural Lifestyles”, and to maintain the unique character and development patterns of unincorporated rural communities.
- **Draft General Plan Background Chapter**: The Draft General Plan Background Chapter provides a summary of the defining characteristics of each region of the unincorporated County. For northern Los Angeles County, the Antelope Valley region is described as an area where residents “value the rural nature of their communities”.
- **Draft General Plan Land Use Element**: The Draft General Plan Land Use Element clearly notes the uniqueness of the County’s rural communities and sets forth various policies to address rural community needs:
 - 1) **General Plan Land Use Legend**: The newly created countywide land use legend includes eight new “Rural Land” land use classifications – one Agriculture (AG) land use, and seven Rural Land (RL) land uses. The seven RL land uses range from Rural Land 1 (RL1), which allows a maximum of 1 dwelling unit per 1 acre, Rural Land 2 (RL2), which allows a maximum of 1 dwelling unit per 2 acres, and also Rural Land 5 (RL 5), Rural Land 10 (RL 10), Rural Land 20 (RL 20), Rural Land 40 (RL 40), and Rural Land 80 (RL 80).

The purpose for the RL land use categories clearly states that it “serves to maintain the character of and serve rural areas”. The Agriculture land use category identifies and establishes areas that are suitable for agricultural production, while the RL designation’s purpose is “to maintain the character of the small communities and rural areas of low-intensity uses within the unincorporated areas of the County”.

The Draft General Plan also describes the types of areas that are suitable for the RL designation as areas that are “served by a non-urban level of commercial uses and public facilities and are expected to experience the most growth pressures from urban expansion.” In addition to areas with scenic values and agricultural areas, further locational criteria for areas that are suitable for the RL land use category includes “areas with low density

development that are generally distant to urban areas” and where “single-family, large-lot residential development is the primary land use”, and areas that may have “steep hillsides, limited vehicular access, and limited to no public infrastructure or facilities”.

- 2) Smart Growth: The Draft General Plan promotes smart growth practices, in part as dictated by several laws that have been recently passed by the California State Legislature that require jurisdictions to plan for greenhouse gas reductions using smart growth land use policies, such as AB 32, the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006. However, the Draft General Plan has been carefully structured to ensure that the County’s smart growth policies are varied in their type and location of use. As expressed in the Draft General Plan, “smart growth in unincorporated Los Angeles County calls for using different strategies that will represent the best outcomes for each individual community. For example, smart growth in the County’s southern basin involves increasing residential and commercial densities along designated transit and commercial corridors, encouraging infill activity and economic investment, and protecting existing community character. For the unincorporated areas in northern Los Angeles County, smart growth involves preserving the rural nature of the region’s small communities, protecting agricultural areas from non-agricultural land uses, fostering a balance between jobs and housing, and ensuring commercial services meet the needs of a growing population.” The Land Use Element additionally outlines eight County smart growth principles, two of which specifically address rural issues:

- Protect the character of the County’s rural areas and communities by discouraging sprawl-like and leapfrog development; and,
- Preserve open spaces in a manner that contains development within existing developed areas, protects the integrity of rural community boundaries, and maintains the environmental functions of the County’s sensitive ecosystems.

- 3) Goals, Policies and Implementation Actions: The following Land Use Element goals and policies were written to address the needs of residents in all of the unincorporated County’s rural areas.

- Goal LU-1: Efficient and progressive land use policies that address the diverse needs of all County residents.
- Policy LU 1.9: Protect rural communities by utilizing natural landforms to create buffers from urban and suburban development.
- Goal LU 3.1: Development that is compatible with surrounding neighborhood character and the natural environment.

- Policy LU 3.1: preserve the unique character of existing communities, both urban and rural.
- Policy LU 3.2: Protect the character of the County's rural communities.

Summary

Every effort is being made to collaborate and incorporate the feedback of the County's rural communities in the development of the General Plan. A revised copy of the Land Use Element was distributed to Antelope Valley residents at community meetings held on February 2, 2009 and February 18, 2009, and General Plan staff continues to refine policy language to ensure that rural communities are addressed in the Draft General Plan.

General Plan staff is also working very closely with the Countywide Studies Team, led by Mitch Glaser, to ensure that the ongoing update to the Antelope Valley Area Plan provides rural communities and the residents of the Antelope Valley with the specific policy language they need to address land use issues that are of local concern to the Antelope Valley. As a part of the General Plan, the Antelope Valley Area Plan update will be a very important component of the successful implementation of rural land use policy in the Antelope Valley.

In addition to the policy language that has been outlined in this report, ongoing collaborative efforts have led to the following outcomes:

- Laura Blank, Executive Director, and Dr. Gene Nebeker, President of the Los Angeles County Farm Bureau are reviewing the Draft General Plan.
- Jacki Ayer of the Acton Town Council provided policy language from the 1980 Adopted General Plan supportive of rural communities for comparison with the Draft General Plan, which was distributed with analysis by staff at the February 2 meeting of the Acton Town Council and the February 18 meeting with members of the Association of Rural Town Councils.
- Wayne Argo, President of the Association of Rural Town Councils organized and facilitated the February 18 meeting with Association members to discuss rural issues and the Draft General Plan with staff.
- Wayne Argo is coordinating tours of rural communities, which will occur over the next few months, to help inform staff of their unique characteristics and needs.

Staff will continue to reach out to rural residents as the Draft General Plan is revised. As instructed by your Board, future outreach efforts will clarify the unique role that rural communities have played in the development of the Draft General Plan. Also, as instructed by your Board, a presentation by staff regarding rural issues in the General Plan Update will be made to the Association of Rural Town Councils on March 26, 2009. The next quarterly report on rural issues and the General Plan Update will be delivered in July 2009.

The Honorable Board of Supervisors
March 10, 2009
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Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact me or Mark Herwick of my staff at (213) 974-6427 or by email at mherwick@planning.lacounty.gov. Our office hours are 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday. We are closed on Fridays.

JS:RCH:MSH

cc: Chief Executive Officer, Attn: Lari Sheehan
County Counsel
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Wayne Argo, President, Association of Rural Town Councils